

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 15 October 2024

Subject: Shaping Our District Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ken Williamson

Recommending:

That the report of the Shaping our District Portfolio Holder be noted.

1. Strategic Masterplans

The North Weald Bassett Strategic Masterplan Framework was endorsed by Cabinet in March 2024. Two outline planning applications have now been received and are under consideration by officers. Discussions are underway with key technical stakeholders on the application including Essex County Council highways and National Highways in relation to capacity improvements to J7 of the M11.

The site developers and promoters of the South Epping Masterplan Area are engaged with Council officers on the development of a Strategic Masterplan and Design Code for the site. These documents have been subject to a public consultation exercise and are currently in the process of being reviewed prior to progressing to Cabinet endorsement.

Masterplan discussions are under way with the two promoters of the West Ongar Concept Framework site. A Quality Review Panel has been held to scrutinise the scheme and a public consultation exercise is underway with an event held on the 11 September 2024.

The South Nazeing Concept Framework has been subject to a recent public consultation exercise and is in the process of being reviewed and updated by the developer. A parallel planning application has been received for the site, but its determination will be dependent on the finalisation and endorsement of the Concept Framework.

The developers of the Waltham Abbey North masterplan are engaged with officers, and a Quality Review Panel was held in August. We await updates on a finalised Strategic Masterplan Framework and will be discussion an appropriate time to target a cabinet decision on public consultation thereafter.

2. Sustainable Travel

Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP) – consultations for Waltham Abbey, Loughton, Buckhurst Hill and Chigwell are live until 13th October, see: www.letstalkessexsustainabletravel.co.uk/lcwip_buckhurst_hill-loughton_clacton-jaywick_dovercourt-harwich_maldon Uttlesford_and_waltham_abbey Good support from Places Leisure with in-person engagement at Waltham Abbey Leisure Centre and their social media. Epping Forest Transport Action Group and parishes also involved and commenting.

Significant bus improvements have happened July-September on the Harlow-Epping-North Weald-Ongar routing, with a peak daytime frequency Epping to North Weald now every 10 minutes; extension of evening bus links to Ongar from Epping by three hours; new Section 106 funded digital live displays in Epping; stabilised and frequent service on the core profitable Harlow to Epping station route; improved links between Waltham Abbey to North Weald; new buses and livery on Central Connect (formerly Vectare) fleet. Almost all the bus improvements are commercial decisions by Central Connect which is now the main bus operator in our area, including taking over various ECC-subsidised Harlow town bus services from Arriva. EFDC to support Central Connect PR.

Good rail news with Roydon, Harlow and Harlow Mill all getting contactless fares from Q2 2025 (Stansted Airport also covered). This will offer cheaper, sometimes much cheaper journeys, convenience versus buying paper or app tickets, less unwitting penalty fare issues, seamless integration with TfL tube services. Exact fares not known, but it appears very likely that the current fare imbalance between Greater Anglia to London versus Epping tube which generates large volume car movements to Epping and other Central Line stations, could start to decline.

TfL officers attending Overview & Scrutiny on 29 October 2024 to update on Central Line quality of service, train and track upgrades and to sound out their attitudes to some of our major Local Plan sites which will drive more usage of the tube network locally. Quarterly member meetings with Transport for London (TfL) will start in 2025 including ad hoc questions.

Test 'marketing' to Electric Vehicle charging operators of EFDC Housing lockup garage and small land sites unsuitable for housing has generated some interest, including lower cost van fleet and local resident 'fast' rather than expensive 'rapid' charging with larger accessible bays. Commercial rapid charger networks see these sites as too small/remote from major roads, but fast charging possibly supported by Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) fund has come up. We still await information on ECC's LEVI bid.

3. Conservation

We currently have 25 designated conservation areas, which national legislation defines as an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

A 6-week public consultation opened on 7 August 2024 on a draft conservation area character appraisal for the St John's area of Buckhurst Hill to become a conservation area. A public exhibition is being held on 3 October 2024 and the consultation closes on 11 October 2024. Subject to the comments received, this could become our first new conservation area for many years.